THE PRESIDENCY.

AN INTERESTING SURVEY OF THE SUBJECT.

A HISTORY OF THE PRESIDENCY. By Edward Stanwood, Litt. D. (Bowdoin). Octavo, pp. iv, 586. Houghton, Mifflin & Co.

The foundation of this volume is the author's well known "History of Presidential Elections," published in 1884. The widening of the original plan which marked the successive editions of that work has, under its new title, been carried still further, and the text has largely been rewritten, the result being a notable increase of importance and value. As a whole, it is the most satisfactory exposition of the facts suggested by its theme that has been written.

If one were to criticise anything in Mr. Stanwood's plan, however, it would be this very comprehensiveness. The historical field which the new title and the avowed aim of the book cover is too wide to be brought within the limits of a single volume. For it includes not only the legal and statistical aspects of the matter—the steps by which the constitutional provisions for the election of the President and Vice-President have been modified, both in effect and in form—and the details of the separate elections, but also the political—the factors which have determined the choice of successive Presidents, and the lines of policy which they have adopted. In addition, the historian of the Presidency should consider in what way the acts of the Presidents and the course of Congress have affected the relations of the Executive to the legislative power which the framers of the Constitution sought to establish. The first of these topics forms a distinct and easily controlled theme; but the second is exceedingly vague and comprehensive, involving directly or indirectly pretty much the entire history of the various political parties. In order to handle it with effect, in brief compass, in connection with the first the view must be arbitrarily and strictly limited to certain of its aspects, and this Mr. Stanwood has not done. His treatment of it is, in effect, a summary account of National politics from Washington to McKinley, which is excellent in its kind, but is marked in many points by inevitable inadequacy and lack of the force which would have characterized the concentration of his attention upon a few well selected points. With regard to the third topic the opposite criticism is to be made, for he omits it altogether. "If it be urged," he says, "that a history of the Presidency should include" such a discussion, the reply may be made that "the office is now what it is in the time of Washington—neither of greater nor of less weight in the government than it was then." This may be true technically, though in view of recent events involving a radical change of National policy effected, practically, by Presidential action alone, one is not disposed to admit it without some qualification. But surely such a struggle between the Executive and Congress as that in the time of Jackson, or in that of Johnson (to say nothing of other periods), even if it resulted in each case in a draw—in no permanent disturbance of the constitutional balance—furnishes abundant material of the utmost importance in its bearing upon Presidential history. The fact, in a word, that the actual power of the President has been modified so little would seem to be in itself one of the things which it is essential to explain. The interest of the story suffers also from the summary way in which the author, in accordance with his theory, dismisses the Jacksonian and Johnsonian episodes.

Mr. Stanwood's discussion of his central theme, the development of the electoral system and the detailed history of its operation in the various elections is, however, in every way admirable. As a comprehensive work of reference on this subject the book leaves little to be desired. The mode of appointing the Chief Magistrate prescribed by the Constitution was at first, as Hamilton said, "the only part of the system of any consequence which escaped without some censure, or which received the slightest mark of approbation from its opponents." But, as Mr. Stanwood adds, it is also the part which in the actual making of the Constitution has suffered the most change and has been subjected to the most earnest and continuous criticism. In choosing the existing method of electing the President and Vice-President the object of the Convention, as is well known, was to avoid on the one hand the augmentation of the power of the larger States, and other (supposed) difficulties which would follow from their election by direct popular vote, and on the other the subordination of the Executive to Congress which would result from their election by the National Legislature. Both aims were, it was thought, secured by the institution of the Electoral College, the members of which were to be chosen as the Legislatures of the several States might direct, and were expected to express, with entire freedom from popular constraint, by their votes the enlightened opinion of the country. This twofold independence of the electors, however, was in fact both undesirable and impossible. Their independence of Congress was, of course, indispensable, and was attained; but the development of political parties made it absolutely necessary to the normal operation of the Government that their function should become, what it now is, the mere mechanical registration of the popular will. This change, although it did not, perhaps, become definitely a part of the unwritten Constitution until the system of party conventions was established, early went into effect practically, and introduced various difficulties and anomalies into the electoral system, some of which have been removed, though others remain to this day. All the incidents of this development, as well as the various legal questions which have been raised with regard to the manner in which Congress should exercise its duty of counting the votes, are discussed by Mr. Stanwood with lucidity and fulness. To follow him in detail is impossible, but his conclusions with regard to the results of the development—the system as it stands to-day—are judicious and well worth quoting:

. . . "Summing up," he says, "the merits and faults of the system as modified by experience, we may at least say this, that it has almost always resulted in giving effect to the popular will, as well as to the will of the States—which was what it was designed to do. The restlessness which advocates radical change in any institution that has turned out not to be perfect, without due consideration of fresh evils that may be introduced by the reform, has devised many substitutes for the system which exists. Yet every substantial evil that has been experienced under the electoral clauses of the Constitution was introduced by politicians for party purposes, and might be cured—granting the desire to cure it—without altering these clauses. If any scheme can be presented which politicians might not pervert, it may be well to consider it."

DANTE AND THE STORY OF UGOLINO.

From The London Telegraph.

In England the cult of Dante is now so widespread that any fact concerning his sublime poem cannot fail to interest a large circle. Many, therefore, will be concerned to hear that the traditional story of Count Ugolino's cannibalistic repasts on his two children and two grandchildren stands in danger of being shown up as nothing more than an artistic but grim allegory. Readers of the Inferno will remember that in the Tenth Circle Dante and Virgil found Count Ugolino munching the cranium of Archbishop Ruggieri. The legend was that the latter, a traitor himself, caused Ugolino, who was another of the same, to be bricked up in the Hunger Tower of Pisa, together with his offspring, and then dropped the keys of the cell into the Arno, in order that no help might be forthcoming to the prisoners. Hundreds of pictures have been painted and countless sonnets have been written on the supposition that the unfortunate Count prolonged, his own days at the expense of his children and grandchildren, but it must be admitted that neither Dante nor tradition gives direct encouragement to such an idea. All that the Italian says is—

"Then hunger did what sorrow could not do."

In describing the death of the unfortunate Ugolino, and on these words a cannibalistic theory has been founded. But recent excavations made in the Monastery of St. Francis at Pisa, of which the Hunger Tower once formed a part, have disclosed the remains of what are supposed to be Count Ugolino, his children and grandchildren, all intact, without a trace of the inhuman feast which was alleged to have taken place, and this discovery, which is causing considerable commotion among Italian men of letters, not only puts an end to a poetic and artistic fiction, but also discredits the story that the bones of the Count and his progeny were removed to Florence. In the course of years fact and gossip are apt to get mixed up, but if the discoveries at Pisa prove authentic many people will be relieved of a nightmare, while the poetic genius of Dante remains unimpaired.